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Investigating Tourists' Revisit Proxies: The Key Role of Destination Loyalty and its Dimensions

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Abstract

Literature in tourism marketing has focused on understanding tourists' revisit patterns, mostly through its proxies (i.e. destination loyalty, past visitation, intention to revisit). Interestingly, however, consensus has not been reached yet, regarding not only the distinctiveness of these proxies but also their interrelationships. This study hypothesizes the impact of past visitation, along with holistic image and subjective norms, on tourists' intention to revisit directly, and via destination loyalty, expecting place attachment to serve as key moderator. Additionally, since research remains quite vague in terms of the destination loyalty components and their operationalization, this study tests other than the baseline model, a competing one, in which we replace destination loyalty construct with two of its main components, namely destination commitment and intention to recommend. Evidence coming from 1292 British tourists visiting Crete, Greece, verifies the distinctiveness of the three proxies and identifies the superior explanatory power of the competing model.

Keywords: destination loyalty, destination commitment, intention to recommend, intention to revisit, holistic image, place attachment

1. Introduction

The tourism literature has long focused on unraveling factors that drive tourists' visiting and revisiting patterns (e.g. Crompton 1979; Fakeye and Crompton 1991; Lau and McKercher 2004) or prevent them from revisiting a destination (e.g. Huang and Hsu 2009; Karl, 2016; Um and Crompton 1992). With respect to the former and given the methodological difficulties related to measuring actual (re)visitation, researchers have turned their interest to past visitation (e.g. Brida, Disegna, and Scuderi 2014; Oppermann 1999), destination loyalty (e.g. Bigné, Andreu, and Gnoth 2005; Prayag and Ryan 2012), intention to revisit a destination (e.g. Malhotra and McCort 2001; Assaker, Esposito Vinzi, and O'Connor 2011) and intention to recommend a destination (Qu, Kim, and Im 2011), considering all these as its potential indicators. Interestingly, though an ample number of studies have previously focused on these revisit indicators, their interrelationships remain rather vague and respective explanatory power of proposed models is quite limited. Even more, numerous researchers have conceptualized these indicators as components of tourists' overall behavioral intentions (e.g. Žabkar, Brenčič, and Dmitrović 2010), or destination loyalty (e.g. Loureiro and Kastenholz 2011). In fact, intention to revisit and intention to recommend a destination appear to be the most common measures of loyalty towards a destination (Eusébio and Vieira 2013; Um, Chon, and Ro 2006). Nevertheless, other researchers insist that intention to revisit should be excluded from destination loyalty measurement (Chen and Gursoy 2001) and that destination loyalty can be best reflected either by intention to recommend and destination commitment - (Gómez, Lopez, and Molina 2015) or by intention to recommend alone (Chen and Gursoy 2001).

Having taken all these issues into consideration, the first aim of the present study is to delineate the relationship between three key proxies of tourists' revisit, namely destination

loyalty, past visitation and intention to revisit a destination. Up until now, only a limited number of researchers have made concurrent use of destination loyalty and revisit intention in their modeling (Ferns and Walls 2012; Huang and Hsu 2009; Lee, Graefe, and Burns, 2007; Silva and Correia 2017), and even fewer included more proxies of tourist loyalty (destination commitment, intention to recommend, and past visitation) in their conceptualization (Meleddu, Paci, and Pulina 2015; Silva and Correia 2017). Therefore, we examine past visitation as a predictor of both destination loyalty and intention to return and, also, incorporate the direct effects of two more antecedents that relate to stimuli of different origin (i.e. an internal - holistic image, and external - subjective norms). Concerning the role of holistic image in shaping tourists' decision making, previous evidence has already linked it with either forms of destination loyalty and/or intention to revisit (e.g., Bigné, Sanchez, and Sanchez 2001; Kim, Park, and Kim 2016; Papadimitriou, Apostolopoulou, and Kaplanidou 2015; Prayag, 2009; Qu, Kim, and Im 2011; Zhang et al. 2014). As regards subjective norms, since travelling is a social activity (Iso-Ahola 1982) and reference groups (e.g. family, friends) may exert significant influence upon travel choices (Hsu et al. 2006), the present study investigates the impact of subjective norms on both destination loyalty and intention to revisit. The combined examination of holistic image and subjective norms as predictors of tourists' behavior and its proxies (i.e. past visitation, destination loyalty and revisit intention) is in line with Ajzen (1991), who posited that the likelihood of a behavioral response may be determined not only by attitudinal internal sources (i.e. holistic image, Stylos et al. 2016) but also by external social stimuli (i.e. social norms) (Ajzen 1991). Finally, we look into the interaction effect which emerges from the incorporation of place attachment (PA) as a moderator of the impact that holistic image, subjective norms and past visitation exert on destination loyalty and revisit intention, as the extent of tourists'

attachment to a destination may modify their attitudinal behaviors towards the destination (Chung et al. 2011; Stylos et al. 2017).

The model described above appears in Figure 1a and formulates the baseline model of this study. Against that, we also hypothesize and test a competing model (Figure 1b). The reason for doing so lies in the fact that destination loyalty per se has been conceptualized and operationalized in numerous ways by researchers, varying between a behavioral (e.g. Alegre and Juaneda 2006), an attitudinal (e.g. Chen, Pike, and Lings 2014), and a composite approach (e.g. Zhang et al. 2014). Even more, several researchers adopting the attitudinal approach suggest that destination loyalty consists of one or more of destination commitment, intention to recommend, and/or intention to revisit (Hosany and Prayag 2013; Silva and Correia 2017; Zhang et al. 2014). Taken together, unlike the baseline model which measures loyalty as the composite of destination commitment and intention to recommend, the competing model investigates separately the role of destination commitment and intention to recommend.

This research makes numerous contributions. First, it sheds light to the interrelationship between tourists' loyalty towards a destination and revisit intention, suggesting that they ought to be conceptualized as standalone constructs and are both worth including in a conceptual framework. Second, it offers insight into the relative explanatory power of loyalty in the prediction of intention to revisit, comparing alternative approaches. Third, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study integrating destination loyalty, intention to revisit a destination and past visitation in a model as distinct theoretical constructs, proposing specific roles for each construct. Fourth, it investigates the combined effect of tourism destination perceptions (namely holistic image) and the perceived social pressure received by significant others for this destination (namely subjective norms) on both tourists' loyalty and revisit intentions, offering

support to Ajzen's (1991) suggestion over the need to examine both internal and external stimuli. Fifth, adopting PA as a moderator of the impacts that holistic image and subjective norms have on loyalty—and separately on its dimensions, i.e. destination commitment and intention to recommend the destination—and revisit intentions, and also taking into consideration the concurrent impact of past visitation, this study offers a thorough investigation of their antecedents. Finally, the examination of the same effects on both destination loyalty and revisit intention offers comparative evidence on the relative strength of each predictor on both, hence providing further insights into the relationship between these two constructs.

[Figure 1 about here]

2. Research Background

2.1 The baseline model

2.1.1 Destination loyalty, intention to revisit a destination, and past visitation

Loyalty towards a destination is a popular research domain among tourism scholars (e.g. Baloglu 2001; Baloglu and Erickson 1998) and has been conceptualized in various ways, including a behavioral, an attitudinal and a composite approach. As with consumer loyalty in general, researchers who investigate destination loyalty among tourists have mainly adopted two approaches, namely the behavioral and the attitudinal, with a third one—the composite—emerging as a combination of the two basic ones. Researchers in consumer behavior adopting a behavioral approach underline the need to use a parsimonious measurement of destination loyalty, postulating that customers' mental associations and emotional states are inadequate indicators of brand loyalty (Tucker 1964), thus putting the emphasis on repeat purchases (Jacoby 1971; Meyer-Waarden and Benavent 2006). Similarly, within the tourism literature, researchers

suggest that frequency of repeat visitation or the proportion of total visits to a specific destination adequately reflects the level of destination loyalty, and repetition is the best evidence of actual loyalty (Alegre and Juaneda 2006).

On the contrary, other researchers in consumer behavior have been steadily challenging the use of repeat purchases as true indicator of brand loyalty (Day 1969; Dick and Basu 1994; Liu-Thompkins and Tam 2013). They posit that attitude and its components (i.e. cognitive, affective, evaluative and pre-dispositional factors) are more effective for measuring brand loyalty, as constraints may prevent individuals from repeating their purchase. In this vein, Jacoby and Kyner (1973) have argued that ‘brand loyalty and repeat-purchase behavior are functionally different phenomena and are mediated by different underlying dynamics’ (p. 7). This approach, being the one adopted in the present study, is thoroughly presented in the following paragraphs.

It is important to note that repetition of prior choices may draw on positive reaction toward a brand and/or habitual patterns (Liu-Thompkins and Tam 2013). These two mechanisms, i.e. attitudinal loyalty and habit, seem to overlap in formulating repetition. The difference between them lies in the role of preference, which is the building block of attitudinal loyalty but is excluded from habit after the establishment of the automatic behavioral process; thus, the inclusion of attitudinal measures is said to distinguish between true and spurious loyalty (Dick and Basu 1994). As Ouellette and Wood (1998) posit, automatic processes are equally important for high involvement decision making and, given that they stem from ‘frequent and consistent experience with the environment, they emerge from stable goals and recurring experiences’ (p. 57). Furthermore, though positive attitude is indeed a forerunner of habit, it is not the only one, as fulfillment of minimum requirements and risk avoidance may also lead to repeat purchases.

As aforementioned, over the years, a third approach has emerged, suggesting the incorporation of a composite (including both behavioral and attitudinal measures) to reach more accurate estimations of destination loyalty (e.g. Dick and Basu 1994; Rauyruen and Miller 2007). Similarly, a number of tourism management scholars has conceptualized destination loyalty as an amalgam of attitude and behavior, arguing that their combination can further enhance the predictive power of destination loyalty (Konečnik and Gartner 2007; Loureiro and Kastenholz 2011; Zhang et al. 2014). This has been considered by many researchers to be an important step forward of the studies on behavioral destination loyalty, as the frequency of visitation alone is only a static indicator that does not necessarily reflect tourists' choices.

Yet, the majority of tourism marketing scholars avoid combining behavioral with attitudinal destination loyalty, considering that the two approaches are distinct (Ekinçi, Sirakaya-Turk, and Preciado 2013; Petrick 2004). As a matter of fact, it has been shown that repeat visitation can be the result of various psychological states or emotional factors (e.g., a feeling of inertia, indifference, risk aversion, a compensatory motivation, a utilitarian approach, or a sense of PA) that do not necessarily relate to true destination loyalty, but may result from habitual processes expressed through behavioral consistency (Alegre and Cladera 2006; Pearce and Kang 2009). Moreover, researchers have supported that attitudinal measures are the most suitable for embodying destination loyalty (e.g. Bianchi, Pike, and Lings 2014), because they provide enhanced explanatory value compared to behavioral measures due to assessing additional variances (Lee et al. 2007). As Chen and Gursoy (2001) indicate, although frequency of purchasing may be a good indicator of loyalty towards travel related services (e.g. transportation, accommodation), visitation frequency is probably not a good proxy of tourists' loyalty toward a

destination, as some tourists may want to feel safe with their choices while others may seek for new travel experiences, and acquaintance with new places and cultures.

Nevertheless, a tourist's intention to revisit a destination, expressing an individual's motivation to utilize resources for repeating a travel to the same destination, does not concur with actual revisit; intention does demonstrate preference, though it does not necessarily lead to action (Huang and Hsu 2009). According to Iso-Ahola's (1982) motivation theory, individuals travel either to escape from their daily routine or to seek new experiences. Therefore, neither the lack of intention to revisit a destination nor the lack of actual repeat visitation can preclude the presence of destination loyalty. Put differently, just as revisit intention does not identify with actual revisit (the first is a predictor or a good estimate of the latter), so too is the case between revisit intention and destination loyalty. Thus, as Correia, Zins, and Silva (2015) postulate, it is not appropriate to use revisit intentions as a proxy for destination loyalty and vice versa. As a matter of fact, this has been also empirically supported by Jang and Feng (2007), who showed that based on varying levels of destination loyalty, tourists may be segmented into three groups, demonstrating different levels of tendency to revisit a destination. Along the same line, Silva and Correia (2017) investigated the direct positive impact of destination commitment on tourists' revisit intention.

Having taken into consideration the variety of destination loyalty conceptualizations and the related argumentation, the present study adopts the attitudinal approach of destination loyalty that combines destination commitment with intention to recommend. From this viewpoint and based on previous evidence drawn on consumer research, it has been indicated that brand loyalty positively affects (re)purchase intentions (e.g. Anderson et al. 2014; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler, 2002). Similarly, in the tourism marketing literature, destination loyalty is

conceptualized and modeled as antecedent of revisit intention (e.g. Bowen and Shoemaker 2003; Ferns and Walls 2012). Thus, intention to revisit a destination is investigated as a distinct construct in this study, and we expect that:

H₁: Tourists' loyalty (at an aggregate level) towards the destination has a positive direct effect on their revisit intentions

Past visitation reflects experiences related to visitation of a given destination at a previous point of time (Huang and Hsu 2009; Kozak 2001; Oppermann 1997). Previous research consistently reports that “past behavioral frequency predicts the occurrence of future behavior over and above established antecedents of behavior such as attitudes and intentions” (Verplanken and Orbell 2003; p. 1313). As Meleddu et al. (2015) note, the probability to recommend a destination increases with the number of tourists' visits to the same destination. Thus, Phillips et al. (2013) have argued that, having past visitors spreading positive word-of-mouth and recommending a visit to others is an important asset for destination marketing. Additionally, past visitation has already been positively linked with tourists' intention to return, as it may be enhanced by the degree of their involvement with the destination (Lehto, O'Leary, and Morrison 2004), triggered by positive attitudes (Alegre and Cladera 2006) and/or habitual processes (Petrick, Morais, and Norman 2001; Zhang et al. 2016). Consequently, we hypothesize that:

H_{2a}: Tourists' past visitation has a positive direct effect on their loyalty towards a destination

2.1.2 Holistic image and its impact on destination loyalty and intention to revisit a destination

Holistic image reflects the overall impression that individuals form of a tourism destination (Chen and Hsu 2000; Tapachai and Waryszak 2000), exceeding the sum of the three destination image components (i.e. cognitive, affective and conative) (Bigné, Sánchez and Sanz 2009; Prayag et al. 2015). When examining tourists' post-visit image perceptions, the holistic or overall aspect of destination image is deemed to be an appropriate measure of it, representing a synthesis of interacted evaluations, emotions and experiences (Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil 2007), blended with wishes and desires (White 2014).

A number of researches provide evidence supporting the significant influence of holistic image on destination loyalty (e.g. Bigné et al. 2009). Zhang et al. (2014) exemplify the predictive value of holistic image, showing in their meta-analysis that this image exerts larger effects on destination loyalty compared to those of individual image components. In fact, previous work demonstrates the positive influence of holistic image on intention to recommend the destination (Prayag 2008; Styliadis, Shani, and Balhassen 2017). Therefore, we anticipate that:

H_{3a}: Holistic image has a positive direct effect on tourists' loyalty towards a destination

Furthermore, it has been empirically shown that holistic image, as a sphere of composite impressions, reflects tourists' summative predisposition toward a destination that may affect their willingness to revisit it (Stylos et al. 2017). Similarly, Lin et al. (2007) demonstrated that holistic image significantly and positively influences destination preference. In fact, as Tasci, Gartner, and Cavusgil (2007) postulate, a holistic image – being integral to the decision-making system – is formed and used by tourists as a comprehensive tool in simplifying the task of selecting a tourism destination. Therefore, it is argued that:

H_{3b}: Holistic image has a positive direct effect on tourists' revisit intentions

2.1.3 Subjective norms and their impact on destination loyalty and intention to revisit a destination

Given that people tend to ask for others' opinions or seek for their approval when they opt for a decision, the feedback received from others may influence personal beliefs, feelings, preferences, and ultimately, plans at varying levels (Quintal, Lee and Soutar 2010; Quintal, Phau and Polczynski 2014). Similarly, numerous researchers have underlined the importance of including social factors as a source of influence on tourists' behavior (e.g. Bergeron et al. 1995; Moutinho 1987; Triandis 1977); namely, the pressures exerted from family, friends and the wider social environment could be substantial on tourists' decision-making processes. In this vein, Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) conceptualization of reasoned action and that of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) are usually taken into consideration in the tourism literature.

With regards to the effect of subjective norms on destination loyalty, Dick and Basu (1994) postulate that direct non-attitudinal social influences may lead to various types of destination loyalty. Furthermore, a study of Olsen (2007) has shown that subjective norms have a direct and positive effect on destination loyalty, thus it could be inferred that expectations and influences originating from the social environment may fuel individuals' sense of commitment to a tourism destination. Consequently, we hypothesize that:

H_{4a}: Subjective norms have a positive direct effect on tourists' loyalty towards a destination

Similarly, the published literature denotes the significance and independent standing of subjective norms in predicting intention to revisit a destination (Han and Kim 2010; Lam and

Hsu 2006), and in all cases revisit intention outputs appear to be proportionate to the social influence inputs (Han 2015; Lai, Yu and Kuo 2010). Therefore, it is anticipated that:

H_{4b}: Subjective norms have a positive direct effect on tourists' revisit intentions

2.1.4 PA as a moderator

Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001, p. 274) defined PA as “affective bond or link between people and specific places”, while Altman and Low (1992, p. 5) conceptualized it as “an interplay of affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviors and actions in reference to a place”. Regarding its content, most researchers agree that PA includes place identity (which reflects an emotional attachment) and, place dependence (which underpins a functional attachment) (e.g., George and George, 2004; Gross and Brown 2008; Lee, Kyle, and Scott 2012; Tsai 2012; Yuksel, Yuksel, and Bilim 2010). Other researchers have added place social bonding (Kyle, Mowen, and Tarrant 2004) and place affect (Ramkissoon, Smith, and Weiler 2013). Given the confusion in terms of the actual number of the components of PA and their heavy interdependence, Ram, Björk, and Weidenfeld (2016) recently proposed to handle PA as a unified construct.

The impact of PA on tourists' intention to revisit a destination has been known for a long time. It is more than 40 years ago that attachment theory (Bowlby 1975) was introduced, and researchers have recently recognized PA as a crucial factor for shaping tourism experience (e.g. Yuksel et al. 2010). In this line of thinking, Prayag and Ryan (2012) postulated that, being attitudinal in nature, PA significantly influences tourists' responses. Furthermore, only a handful of studies in the tourism literature have adopted PA as a moderator thus far (i.e. Chung et al.

2011; King, Chen, and Funk 2015; Kyle et al. 2003). The regulating role of PA can be explained by the fact that the meaning attributed to a specific tourism destination can be unique for each tourist, thus allowing a totally subjective perspective (Gross and Brown 2008).

Evidence suggests that tourists' attachment to a particular destination serves as an underlying mechanism that carries past visitation influence on decision making processes (e.g. revisit intention and actual visitation) and loyalty (Chen and Phou 2013; Gursoy, Chen and Chi 2014; Lee 2011). Additionally, Iwasaki and Havitz (2004) showed that unwillingness to change and attachment to a certain situation (object or place) moderates the effects exerted on loyalty. Hence, our expectation here is that PA would moderate the direct effects that past visitation, has on destination loyalty and revisit intentions. Taken together, we hypothesize that:

H_{5a}: PA moderates the direct effect of past visitation on destination loyalty, such that this effect will be stronger for tourists with low PA

Additionally, it is expected that:

H_{5b}: PA moderates the direct effect of past visitation on revisit intentions, such that this effect will be stronger for tourists with low PA

The moderating role of PA on destination image is also exemplified by King, Chen, and Funk (2015) who revealed that tourists' psychological connection to the destination moderated the pattern in which the three facets of destination image decayed. Concerning holistic image in particular, tourists who develop strong bonds with a destination are likely to experience a weakened effect of overall destination image on their behavioral responses with respect to the destination. As Stylos et al. (2017) supported, a strong moderating PA effect relaxes the relationship between holistic image and revisit intentions. Furthermore, since destination loyalty

serves as an alternative to the measurement of actual future visitation, it is plausible to postulate that similar PA moderating effects would apply to the holistic image – loyalty relationship too (McKercher and Guillet, 2011). Hence, the expectation is that:

H_{6a}: PA moderates the direct effect of holistic image on destination loyalty (at an aggregate level), such that this effect will be stronger for tourists with low PA

and,

H_{6b}: PA moderates the direct effect of holistic image on revisit intentions, such that this effect will be stronger for tourists with low PA

Accordingly, bonds to a tourism destination create resistance to change and a relevant psychological commitment to the place, which may also alleviate the extent to which tourists seek for others' approval or allow others' opinion when they compare alternative tourism destinations (Iwasaki and Havitz 2004). This expectation relies upon the fact that the extrinsic influence of norms stemming from the social environment on various forms of behavior could be potentially mitigated by a well formulated sense of attachment to the destination. To put it differently, the need to rely on others' opinions or descriptions of personal experiences in selecting or visiting a tourism destination may be more apparent due to weaker intrinsic drives and relation felt towards the destination.

Thus, we hypothesize that:

H_{7a}: PA moderates the direct effect of subjective norms on destination loyalty (at an aggregate level), such that this effect will be stronger for tourists with low PA

and,

H_{7b}: PA moderates the direct effect of subjective norms on revisit intentions, such that this effect will be stronger for tourists with low PA

2.2 The competing model

As aforementioned, this study adopts the attitudinal approach of destination loyalty. Yet, again there is no agreement on the content and measurement of this construct. In fact, multiple viewpoints have been developed, encompassing various combinations of commitment, recommendation and intention to revisit a destination. The most common viewpoint encapsulates all three possible components of attitudinal destination loyalty reflected by multi-item measurement scales of the individuals' commitment toward a tourism destination and readiness to revisit and recommend (Bianchi et al. 2014; Mamoun et al. 2015). Then, combinations of only two components appear in several journal articles; that is, destination commitment and intention to recommend (Boo, Busser, and Baloglu 2009; Gómez et al. 2015), as well as intention to recommend and intention to revisit (Antón et al. 2014; Velázquez, Saura, and Molina 2011). Finally, a number of researchers support that only one out of three constructs could adequately reflect attitudinal destination loyalty. Thus, some of them operationalize attitudinal destination loyalty in terms of commitment (i.e. tourists' strength of affection) (Li and Petrick 2010; Silva and Correia 2017) or propensity to recommend (Chen and Gursoy 2001; Hosany and Prayag 2013; Lee and Yoo 2015) alone, and others as intention to revisit a destination (Meleddu et al. 2015; Zhang et al. 2014).

Consequently, this study examines a competing model, in which destination commitment and intention to recommend are examined as distinct constructs, replacing loyalty that emerges from

their aggregation. Hence, we retest all previous hypotheses, separately for destination commitment and intention to recommend the destination. The hypotheses that describe the direct effects from holistic image, past visitation and subjective norms on intention to revisit a destination, and the relevant interaction effects originating from PA are common in the baseline and competing models (i.e. H_{2b} , H_{3b} , H_{4b} , H_{5b} , H_{6b} and H_{7b}). Additionally, a new series of hypotheses emerge to reflect the effects from the three exogenous variables on revisit intentions via intention to recommend and destination commitment.

The positive influence of image, and particularly that of holistic image, on tourists' future behaviors has been empirically well supported (Bigné et al. 2009). For example, Bigné et al. (2001) clearly linked tourists' holistic images to their intentions to recommend, as well as revisit destinations. Therefore, it can be assumed that:

H_{1a} : Tourists' intention to recommend the destination has a positive direct effect on their revisit intentions

and,

H_{3a1} : Holistic image has a positive direct effect on tourists' intention to recommend a destination

Then, the relationships between personal antecedents (including elements of image) and commitment, as well as between commitment and loyalty within a leisure context were suggested (Kim, Scott and Crompton 1997; Iwasaki and Havitz 2004) and found to gain support. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_{1b}: Tourists' commitment to the destination has a positive direct effect on their revisit intentions

and,

H_{3a2}: Holistic image has a positive direct effect on tourists' commitment to a destination

Numerous researchers have demonstrated the influence of past visitation and prior experience on tourists' intention to recommend (e.g. Chen and Tsai 2007; Rodríguez Molina, Frías-Jamilena, and Castañeda-García 2013) and to commit to a certain destination (e.g. George and George 2004; Lee et al. 2007). Hence, it is expected that:

H_{2a1}: Tourists' past visitation has a positive direct effect on their intention to recommend a destination

and,

H_{2a2}: Tourists' past visitation has a positive direct effect on their commitment to a destination

The importance of subjective norms (social pressure) in developing long-term commitment to a destination (e.g. Jang and Feng 2007) and their influences on tourists' intention to recommend a destination (e.g. Choe and Kim 2018; Lee 2009) have been previously explored, tested and supported. Thus, it is proposed that:

H_{4a1}: Subjective norms have a positive direct effect on tourists' intention to recommend a destination

and,

H_{4a2} : Subjective norms have a positive direct effect on tourists' commitment to a destination

The previous discussion on moderating the direct relationships of the baseline model produced a set of hypotheses to be tested in the case of competing model too. There is evidence in the published literature regarding the moderating role of PA in the relationships between the three exogenous variables and tourists' attitudes and future behaviors, i.e. their sense of commitment to a destination and their willingness to recommend it, respectively (Kim, Lee and Lee 2017; King, Chen and Funk 2015; White, Virden and Van Riper 2008). Therefore, we summarize the following hypotheses for testing the moderating role of PA in the competing model:

H_{5a1}: PA moderates the direct effect of past visitation on intention to recommend a destination, such that this effect will be stronger for tourists with low PA

H_{5a2}: PA moderates the direct effect of past visitation on commitment to a destination, such that this effect will be stronger for tourists with low PA

H_{6a1}: PA moderates the direct effect of holistic image on intention to recommend a destination, such that this effect will be stronger for tourists with low PA

H_{6a2}: PA moderates the direct effect of holistic image on commitment to a destination, such that this effect will be stronger for tourists with low PA

H_{7a1}: PA moderates the direct effect of subjective norms on intention to recommend a destination, such that this effect will be stronger for tourists with low PA

H_{7a2}: PA moderates the direct effect of subjective norms on commitment to a destination, such that this effect will be stronger for tourists with low PA

3. Methodology and data

3.1 Research procedures

Appropriate sample size considerations have been applied in order to attain model stability and reach trustworthy results via structural equation modeling (Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson, 2010). Furthermore, power analysis was conducted based on effect size =0.3; $\alpha=0.05$; power =0.95; $df=274$; critical $\chi^2=313.608$, and, as a result, a minimum sample size of 973 usable responses was adopted to detect even small moderating effects (Faul et al. 2007).

Specific research procedures were followed prior to, during, and after the survey, to enhance the reliability and validity of survey measurements, and avoid response bias, minimizing coverage, sampling, non-response and measurement errors (Groves 2006). Coverage error has been controlled by targeting only departing tourists, boarding to charter flights towards British airports. With regards to the random sampling error, we sought for an increased sample size to mitigate it (Moutinho and Chien 2007). The final size of the usable questionnaires sample was 1292, suggesting a maximum sampling error of 2.7%. Moreover, a series of measures were taken to avoid systematic biases. First, all data were collected under the same conditions and all respondents were provided with identical information regarding the study. Second, as Dolnicar, Laesser, and Matus (2009) advise, the survey instrument was in respondents' native language and field researchers were well qualified to run the data collection process. A balanced formulation of measurement scales (7-point Likert or semantic differential scales) was implemented to prevent any possible measurement errors. In specific, acquiescence was restricted by avoiding vague or ambiguous wording in the statements (Knowles and Condon

1999). Midpoint responding and extreme response style were controlled by including additional items for measuring the constructs where this was feasible, as well as including a “0 = I cannot answer” option in most scales (De Jong, Steenkamp, Fox, and Baumgartner 2008). Additionally, all measures / observed items have been previously utilized in surveys involving British tourists, therefore a pilot study, prior to the main one, was not necessary.

Common method variance was also tested via a common latent factor test (CLF) to investigate respondents’ tendency to expend less effort in responding to a long series of questions appropriately (MacKenzie and Podsakoff 2012). As the chi-squared difference tests revealed that the difference between the fully constrained and unconstrained models is not significant for either the baseline or the competing model ($\Delta\chi_{agg}^2 = 29.515$, $df_{agg} = 21$, and $p_{agg} = 0.102 > 0.05$, and $\Delta\chi_{dim}^2 = 26.5$, $df_{dim} = 21$, and $p_{dim} = 0.188 > 0.05$), common method bias effects are not expected to seriously distort the findings of this research (Malhotra, Kim, and Patil 2006).

3.2 Sampling and data collection

This study took place among UK tourists visiting Crete, Greece. Crete is the largest Greek island spanning 8,336 km² and situated in the Southeastern part of the Mediterranean Sea (Andriotis 2001). Its pleasant climatic conditions, beautiful landscapes and beaches, and distinctive Cretan culture and gastronomy attract millions of tourists from around the world (Argophilia 2017). Crete is a very favorite vacations place for UK residents too, who visit the island either via tour operators’ services or individually (tom Dieck, Fountoulaki, and Jung 2018).

The UK tourist market was selected because a) it is a top global outbound tourism performer, b) it represents almost 10% of the total tourism incoming market of Greece, demonstrating a steady increase in absolute numbers since 2012 (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2015; 2016) and c) British tourists are the second largest tourist market of Crete, comprising almost 40% of the inbound tourism (Apostolakis and Jaffry 2009), in the booming Cretan tourism sector.

Specifically, the study focused on UK tourists holidaying in Crete, on organized group travel packages. The survey took place during July 10–30, 2016 and was run in cooperation with two major UK tour operators that specialize in package holidays in Crete. On their last day of stay and as part of the program, tourists were offered a lift to either Chania (CHQ) or Heraklion (HER) airports to depart via charter flights towards six airports located in England (i.e. Birmingham, Bristol, London Gatwick, London Stansted, London Luton, and Manchester). During queuing to board the coaches, tourists were selected based on a systematic random sampling scheme and were subsequently invited to participate in the field research study. A printed copy of the measurement instrument and a pen were provided to every other tourist, asking them to responsibly respond to all questions. The cover page of the survey form assured the participants that the research was guaranteeing voluntarily participation, anonymity and confidentiality of the data collection and handling processes. Respondents were asked to hand in the filled-out questionnaire to the tour guide upon arrival to the airport. The average completion time did not exceed fifteen minutes. 1578 UK tourists were invited to participate in the survey, and 1337 consented during the 20-day-research period. Overall, 1292 usable questionnaires were gathered, producing a final response rate of 81.87%. Regarding respondents' profile, the sample has been well-balanced between males and females, with over 63% of them being between 20

and 49 years-old. Also, almost two thirds of respondents hold an undergraduate or graduate degree, and half of them are full time employees.

3.3 Measures

Intention to revisit destination: A 4-item scale was utilized to measure revisit intentions, adopted by Stylos et al. (2017). A 7-point semantic differential scale with anchors of “1 = extremely unlikely” and “7 = extremely likely” was employed, as well as a “0 = I cannot answer” option, in case respondents felt they were not in position to provide a reply.

Destination loyalty: It was measured with seven items. The scale resulted as aggregate of three previously published multi-item measures. In specific, three items denoting tendency to recommend a destination were adopted from Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996), corresponding to questionnaire items IR1, IR2, and IR3 (*intention to recommend*). Two more items (i.e. DC1 and DC4) were included from Zeithaml et al. (1996) to capture tourists’ willingness to stick to the same destination if variations in cost were reasonable. The final two items - DC2 and DC3 -were developed by Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000) to measure tourists’ *destination commitment*. A 7-point Likert scale anchored with “1 = strongly disagree” and “7 = strongly agree” was utilized to measure tourists' evaluations, including “0 = I cannot answer”.

Holistic image: It was measured with a single item according to Echtner and Ritchie’s (2003) suggestions. Tourists were asked to report their overall perception of Crete as a tourism destination. A 7-point semantic differential scale was used, ranging from “1 = very negative” to “7 = very positive”; also, neutral and smiley / sad faces were added on the midpoint and two extremes of the measurement scale, respectively, to assist with responding.

Subjective norms: Three items were utilized to measure this construct, which were adopted from Lam and Hsu (2004). Again, a 7-point Likert scale with anchors “1 = strongly disagree” and “7 = strongly agree” was employed, and a “0 = I cannot answer” option was offered in case respondents could not evaluate some of the items.

Past visitation: This was measured with a single item originating from Campo-Martínez, Garau-Vadell, and Martínez-Ruiz (2010) work, and asking respondents to report how many times they traveled to Crete for vacations during the last 5 years.

PA: It was measured via an 8-item scale provided by Prayag and Ryan (2012). Tourists were asked to respond on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “1 = strongly disagree” to “7 = strongly agree”, including a “0 = I cannot answer” option to avoid false neutral responses.

4. Results

After checking the internal consistency of the constructs, which was found in all cases to exceed the minimum standard of 0.70 for reliability (Hair et al. 2010), a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with promax rotation was performed to examine the dimensionality of the destination loyalty construct. PCA suggested all seven loyalty items to load on one factor only (with loadings ranging between 0.704 and 0.890), explaining 64.533% of the variance.

Then, implementation of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) ratified the dimensionality of all constructs' measurement scales except for item DC4 (“*willing to pay higher prices in order to have holidays again in Crete, than I would for other tourism destinations*”), which was

excluded from the destination loyalty scale due to carrying a standardized factor loading below 0.50 (Janssens et al. 2008).

The normality of the dataset was evaluated, as deviations from univariate and multivariate normality may distort the results (Byrne 2016). First, univariate normality was checked via skewness and kurtosis values, which were found within acceptable range, i.e. -0.848 to 0.764 and -0.499 to 0.980, respectively. Furthermore, multivariate normality was examined by comparing the value of Mahalanobis distance (174.524) to the corresponding chi-square critical value (195.973, $df = 165$, $\alpha = 0.05$). As the distance value was found smaller than the critical one, it was then inferred that there are no multivariate outliers (Pallant 2010). Next, the value of multivariate kurtosis, i.e. Mardia's coefficient (370.540) with a critical ratio of 219.991 is smaller than the cut-off point value of 483 resulted from the $p(p+2)$ formula (Bollen 1998), where $p = 21$ is the number of observed variables; thus, it was concluded that the assumption of multivariate normality of the sample data distribution is supported. Based on this outcome, the scale reliability and validity of the model constructs included in the measurement model were then assessed.

Table 1 provides the final list of items with their means and standard deviations corresponding to the proposed constructs. Additionally, the standard loadings, standard errors and t-statistics of the relationships between observed and latent variables are tabulated.

[Table 1 about here]

The model fits the data satisfactorily for both the baseline and competing models (i.e. aggregate and dimensional loyalty models, respectively), as shown in Figure 2. Due to the introduction of the moderating variable and corresponding interaction terms, the latent variables

have been replaced by composite ones to reduce the complexity of the structure. A representative set of fit indices are reported with all of them clearly satisfying the established criteria for both measurement and structural models (Table 2). Furthermore, construct reliability and validity have been examined (see Table 3). When checking for discriminant validity, the square root of average variance extracted for each construct was found in all cases and for both models to be greater than the estimated correlation of the factors.

[Table 2 about here]

[Table 3 about here]

Regarding the paths examined in the structural models, the following general outcomes are noted. Eight direct relationships and four moderating effects were found to be significant from a total of fifteen relationships tested for the baseline (aggregate loyalty) model, as shown on Figure 2 and Table 4. In case of the competing model, eleven direct relationships and five moderating effects were found to be significant from a total of twenty-three relationships tested (see Figure 3).

The influence of destination loyalty on intention to revisit destination is strong and highly significant providing support to H₁ of baseline model (see Table 4). However, in the competing model, the influence of only destination commitment on revisit intention is significant, whereas the corresponding effect exerted from intention to recommend is not significant, thus leading to support of H_{1a} and rejection of H_{1b}, respectively. The effect of past visitation on revisit intention is positive and significant, as it was hypothesized, thus H_{2b} is supported for the baseline and competing models, respectively. Then, past visitation exerts a non-significant positive effect on destination loyalty in the baseline model. Interestingly, past visitation exerts a significant and

positive effect on destination commitment, whereas the corresponding influence on intention to recommend is negligible and non-significant. Then, all effects exerted from holistic image on destination loyalty and its dimensions are positive and significant, providing support to H_{3a} , H_{3a1} and H_{3a2} . Moreover, the effects exerted from holistic image and subjective norms on intention to revisit the destination comprise a proposed set of indirect relationships via destination loyalty and its dimensions, for both baseline and competing models, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. With regards to the baseline model, the influence of holistic image on revisit intention is transmitted via destination loyalty, as both direct and indirect effects are positive and significant (see Table 4); thus, H_3 is supported. Similarly, all effects exercised from subjective norms on destination loyalty and its antecedents are positive and strongly significant ($p < 0.001$), thus providing support to H_{4a} , H_{4a1} and H_{4a2} . Furthermore, subjective norms do have an indirect effect on intention to revisit the destination via destination loyalty, thus H_4 cannot be rejected. Finally, some more relationships emerged, introducing indirect effects from PA on revisit intention in addition to the direct ones, for both the baseline and competing models, respectively (see Table 4 and Figure 2).

Data analysis supports four PA moderating effects in the baseline model, with half of them influencing relationships between holistic image, subjective norms and destination loyalty, and the rest changing the strength of relationships between holistic images, past visitation and revisit intentions. Similarly, five significant moderating effects are exerted from PA on the relationships between the exogenous variables and destination loyalty dimensions, as well as revisit intentions, showing important differences between the baseline and competing models on the moderations hypothesized (see Figure 2 and Table 4). The main characteristic of the statistically significant moderations is that all of them dampen the relationships between the exogenous variables and

the endogenous ones (i.e. destination loyalty, intention to recommend, destination commitment, revisit intention) for both the baseline and the competing model (see Figures 2 and 3).

[Figure 2 about here]

[Figure 3 about here]

[Table 4 about here]

To further understand the key moderating role of PA, the interaction effects between PA and holistic image, as well as PA and subjective norms on destination loyalty have been plotted for the baseline model (Figure 4). Moreover, Figure 5 demonstrates the interactions between holistic image and PA, as well as between past visitation and PA on intention to revisit destination for both the baseline and competing models. Apparently, PA moderates those relationships so that for tourists with low PA, both destination loyalty and revisit intention increase. In contrast to this, tourists with high PA are less likely to become more loyal to the destination or revisit it as the levels of holistic image, subjective norms and past visitation increase; only small differences in slopes are encountered between the two models. Similar conclusions are extracted for the rest of moderations hypothesized in the competing model too (see Figures 6, 7). Interestingly, the moderation $HI \times PA$ on destination loyalty is different at competing level compared to the baseline one. In this case, the examination of the $HI \times PA$ effect on destination loyalty dimensions reveals that this moderating effect on destination commitment is significant, whereas the same effect on intention to recommend is non-significant, whereas the $HI \times PA$ effect on destination loyalty at baseline level appears to be significant overall.

In the proposed baseline (aggregate loyalty) structural model, the squared multiple correlation R^2 value for destination loyalty is 0.575 or explains 57.5% of loyalty variance, and the

corresponding value for revisit intention is 0.484 (> 0.25) or 48.4% of the variance in the intention to revisit the destination, indicating that this structural arrangement has a high predictive power. Furthermore, the R^2 values estimated via the competing (dimensional loyalty) model for the intention to recommend, destination commitment and revisit intention latent variables are 50.5%, 48.5% and 53.9%, respectively. A comparison of the resulting squared multiple correlations between the two models (see Figures 2 and 3) shows that the loyalty dimensions of the competing model function in a complementary manner leading to an 11.4% higher explanatory value on intention to revisit the destination.

[Figure 4 about here]

[Figure 5 about here]

[Figure 6 about here]

[Figure 7 about here]

5. Discussion and implications

5.1 Theoretical implications

So far numerous researchers have highlighted the need to unravel the antecedents of revisit intention towards a destination, when designing the tourism destination product (Correia, Zins, and Silva 2015; Kozak and Rimmington 2000). Considering revisit intention as the closest proxy to actual revisit and given that existing research is largely confusing in terms of the distinctiveness of indicators of actual tourists' revisit, this study also incorporates destination loyalty and past visitation. Additionally, seeking to add to current knowledge in terms of the

explanatory power of tourists' destination loyalty at an aggregate and a dimensional level (i.e. intention to recommend a destination and destination commitment), we tested a baseline and a competing model.

Our first aim was to delineate the relationship between revisit intention, destination loyalty, and past visitation. Regarding the relationship between destination loyalty and intention to revisit, the findings of the baseline model agree with those (few) studies highlighting their distinctiveness, while the positive impact of destination loyalty on revisit intention offers support to the attitudinal nature of the former. Evidently, destination commitment and intention to recommend are sufficient representations of destination loyalty. Regarding the third indicator of revisit behavior, namely past visitation, our results show that past visitation enhances revisit intention only, probably because habit, costs, comfort and/or convenience may influence tourists' preferences (e.g. McCabe, Li, and Chen 2016).

To further investigate the predictive mechanisms of revisit intention, we also examined the effect of holistic image and subjective norms on revisit intention, directly and indirectly – via loyalty. Images are considered a cornerstone of destination marketing research (Assaker and Hallak 2013; Tasci and Gartner 2007), while subjective norms have received less attention. Nevertheless, as Ajzen (1991) advocated, both internal and external stimuli activate tourists' attitudinal and behavioral responses, implying that tourists' decision making is influenced not only by their attitude towards perceived tourism destination characteristics driven by intrinsic motives, but also by what significant others think of their choices. Put differently, it appears that attitudes and attitudinal behaviors are not only shaped by the destination attributes and unique offers (e.g. Styliadis et al. 2017), but also by others' approval of destination's appropriateness with respect to individual interests and circumstances (e.g. Prayag et al. 2015). Moreover, this

study suggests that loyalty links holistic image to intention to revisit, thus it plays a key role in transmitting the overall impression of the destination towards future decision making; Hence, it may be argued that attitudinal loyalty should be included as an antecedent of tourists' intention to revisit a destination. This agrees with consumer behaviour research in other areas, such as retailing (Yi and La 2004), social networking (Munnukka, Karjaluo, and Tikkanen 2015), and the non-profit and voluntary sector (Hume, Mort, and Winzar 2007).

In fact, our results demonstrate that tourist loyalty strengthens the holistic image – revisit intention relationship, as the indirect effects exerted through destination loyalty (baseline model) and destination commitment (competing model) have much higher loadings compared to the direct effects. Similarly, in congruence with the influences of reference groups on individuals' attitudes and behaviors, loyalty (both at an aggregate and also at a dimensional level via destination commitment) does transmit the indirect effect that subjective norms have on tourists' intention to revisit a destination, indicating that subjective norms add to loyalty before they enhance intention to return to a destination. Besides, subjective norms proposed by Ajzen (1991) have been reported to successfully encapsulate reference group influences on tourists' intentions and behavior (Quintal, Lee, and Soutar 2010; Petrick et al. 2001; Sparks 2007).

Finally, concerning PA, our findings emphasize its key role when predicting destination loyalty and revisit intention, in congruence with previous researchers postulating the need to further investigate the moderating role of PA (e.g. Chung et al. 2011). Our findings do verify the regulating role of PA, both in terms of significance and direction of the effects. In all cases, PA slightly dampens the positive relationships between holistic image, subjective norms and destination loyalty, as well as those between past visitation, holistic image and intention to revisit the destination, in this case Crete. Additionally, attachment to Crete moderates the direct effect

of subjective norms on tourists' destination loyalty, such that this effect slightly relaxes for tourists with high PA. On the other hand, PA does not change significantly the strength of the subjective norms - intention to revisit relationship. Similarly, although PA filters out the strength of the effect exerted from past visitation on intention to revisit Crete, the same cannot be supported for the past visitation – loyalty relationship. Overall, considering its multiple moderating role and its direct effect on revisit intention, these findings stress the importance of taking into account PA when investigating destination loyalty and revisit intention antecedents.

With regards to the competing model, which examines two destination loyalty indicators - namely destination commitment and intention to recommend - as distinct constructs, interesting findings emerged. First of all, the explanatory power of the competing model in predicting intention to revisit the destination is higher than that of the baseline model, as the first provides more in-depth information about the relationships. This is reflected in the R^2 values of endogenous constructs and the differences in the magnitudes and levels of significance of regression weights. So, the competing model reveals whether intention to recommend, destination commitment or both of them transmit the effects from exogenous variables to intention to revisit a destination.

This implies that loyalty dimensions function complementarily, thus further enhancing the explanatory value of hypothesized models. Even more, the independent and simultaneous investigation of destination commitment and intention to recommend reveals differences in the relationships investigated, contrasting the vast majority of previous studies which suggest an aggregate measurement of destination loyalty utilizing one, two or more components to form a scale (e.g. Chi and Qu 2008; Ribeiro et al. 2018). In specific the current study reveals that, although the relationship between past visitation and loyalty is non-significant at an aggregate

level, past visitation does have a positive impact on tourists' commitment to the destination. Similarly, the relationship between loyalty and revisit intention is positive; yet, intention to recommend a destination alone does not influence tourists' intention to revisit a destination.

Concerning PA, not only the $HI \times PA$ moderating effects on destination loyalty are different at an aggregate and dimensional level, but also the moderating role of PA is significant only in the case of intention to recommend. Such findings also offer support to the need to separately model the dimensions of destination loyalty to increase the depth of analysis, to reveal potentially hidden effects, and to ultimately deepen our understanding on the relevant behavioral concepts. Therefore, when examining destination loyalty, it is of utmost importance to realize that its conceptualization and, in turn, measurement may cause variations in findings.

All in all, this study underpins the essential role that destination loyalty plays in transmitting the effects exerted by holistic image (Assaker, Vinzi and O'Connor 2011; Tasci and Gartner 2007), subjective norms, and past visitation (Huang and Hsu 2009; Petrick, Morais and Norman 2001) on intention to revisit a tourism destination. Nevertheless, to reach safe conclusions researchers ought to incorporate different dimensions of destination loyalty and focus on examining their distinct relationships with the rest of the constructs under investigation.

The differences encountered between the baseline and competitive models underline the importance of testing alternative conceptualizations of destination loyalty for improving theoretical robustness and getting closer to an optimized theoretical representation overall. This approach could be potentially extended to other constructs too, especially in those cases where there is diachronic debate about construct dimensionalities. Hence, researchers could develop

theoretical constructs of high levels of accuracy that would advance research outputs in the study of tourist behavior.

5.2 Practical implications

Further to the key theoretical implications discussed, this study contributes to better understanding and influencing the tourist behavior in practice. Specifically, we illustrate the value of concurrently fostering repeat visitation, social bonds and tourists' loyalty in the destination selection process, which could potentially underpin the competitiveness of tourism destinations (Alegre and Cladera 2006; Ekinçi et al. 2013; Meleddu et al. 2015).

The design and implementation of appropriate destination branding and communication strategies could upgrade the actual overall image held by customers to the level of desired destination brand identity (Cai 2002). This process could be operationalized not only by Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), but also by private organizations such as lodgings, theme parks and resorts (Pike 2016). Furthermore, the overall destination image could be enhanced by utilizing the latest smartphone applications, such as augmented reality tourism and mobile electronic tourist guides (METGs) (Morrison, 2013). Augmented reality is excellent in bringing tourists 3D superimposed images and supplementary information that further improves sightseeing experience, and may even assist with selecting accommodation, dining, shopping and entertainment. METGs may considerably improve tourists' access to information, ensuring flexibility, information variety and accessibility, and may ultimately lead to increased destination loyalty (Peres, Correia, and Moital 2011). Regarding the influence of holistic image on revisit intentions, marketers should communicate the unique characteristics of a destination

via mass-scale communication campaigns at visitors' countries of origin (e.g. satellite TV programs, hosting special cultural events – mobile expositions). Enhancing destination loyalty could be materialized by offering experiential marketing activities during tourists' vacations at the destination, such as authentic local experiences, e.g. traditional festivals, cultural activities, local thematic fairs and recreational fishing. Also, participation to travel and tourism fairs (e.g. the holiday & travel show in London) is an important tool for destination marketers to support destination's holistic image.

Taking initiatives to increase the two dimensions of loyalty in specific, i.e. intention to recommend and destination commitment should become tourism marketers' main priority, due to their key role in reinforcing positive images, behavioral and social patterns to develop into plans for visiting the same destination again. Destination managers should create an amalgam of authentic experiences that make this destination a unique and unrivaled choice in people's minds and hearts. For example, coupling the natural destination characteristics with local customs and cultural traditions into carefully designed tourist experiences, is a tried and solid way to create an unforgettable tourism destination product that would potentially be chosen repeatedly. This way destination marketing managers could expect not only highly committed visitors that would even overlook small increases on service prices, but also the wide spread of positive WOM.

Concerning the impact of subjective norms on loyalty, and in turn on revisit intentions, it is crucial for marketers to conduct proper marketing research and trace tourists' social environment in detail to uncover the influences coming from certain human interactions and communication before, during and after a travel (Morrison, 2013). Also, the social interactions on a peer-to-peer basis may be further strengthened via collecting and analyzing user-generated content (Pantano, Priporas and Stylos 2017), displaying audiovisual material, communicate

upcoming events and promotional programs (e.g. the Great Barrier Reef Competition held in Australia in 2015), and collect feedback about the performance of relevant communications and the destination itself through gamification techniques (Fotiadis and Stylos 2017).

The direct influence of visitation frequency on both loyalty and revisit intention can, in practice, be implemented through customized contact of previous visitors, and by compiling good value-for-money travel packages via targeted email campaigns, respectively. Offering bundles of services in the form of packages (e.g. hotel deals, sightseeing passes, tour offers, day trips, museum, theatre and attraction tickets, restaurant deals) and even setting special agreements with airlines to offer additional connections and ticket offers (e.g. deals between Ryanair and cities across Europe to subsidize flights) are practices that may increase the possibility of revisiting a destination. Finally, the promotion of short-stay trips and mini-vacations is a very good way to keep close to tourists that have visited a destination quite a few times in the past, especially if the destination product offering is frequently revitalized.

With regards to our anticipation on the moderating role of PA, it seems that for tourists with low PA, specific actions can be taken towards enriching the effect that positive holistic images have on their loyalty and revisit intention, aiming at improving various aspects of the tourist experiences chain, from the outbound journey to the return one. Then, focusing on improved serviceability, engaging the front-line employees in all “moments of truth” and introducing smart technologies in selected processes could contribute to overcoming the low PA inherent in certain groups of tourists, and therefore lead to a higher state of loyalty and intention to return to the same destination. Also, accessibility to Crete via more frequent flights all year-round may increase place dependence and, subsequently, PA (Williams and Vaske 2003). From another point of view, it has been suggested that as people age they get more involved in the

communities they belong, and they tend to become more aware of the significance of their sense of place (Anton and Lawrence 2014); thus, trying to attract e.g. baby boomers and generation X tourists along with their families to Crete would help increase PA of the visiting population. Further to the role of tourists' involvement on increasing their attachment to the destination, it is important for DMOs to invest on factors such as lifestyle, gastronomical tradition of the place and the potential for tourist self-expression (Gross and Brown 2008), while shaping the tourism destination marketing offering.

Finally, with respect to the moderation of the relationship between subjective norms and destination loyalty, it appears that for tourists experiencing low PA, it would be advisable to reinforce the influences exerted from their social environment; in this case, by observing, collecting and analyzing data from online social interactions – reviews and comments – publicly available via social networking platforms, and intervening in a way that people's communications may favor the tourism destination of interest, e.g. creating targeted communication campaigns, online promotions and advergames. Considering this as part of a wider promotional mix, a DMO umbrella web portal with appropriate branded content can serve as an integrated platform that may propel tourists' loyalty towards the destination. This web portal could consist of activities such as crowdsourcing, inviting people from across the globe to promote the tourism destination by posting their experiences, photos and videos.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

While this research study is deemed to have a considerable contribution to the conceptualization of tourists' decision making, it is not without limitations. First, the field research study took

place at a particular island of Greece. Though Crete is a world-famous Mediterranean tourism destination, future research may test the proposed model at different destinations to compare outcomes and check generalizability of relevant conclusions. Second, the proposed framework was tested with tourists coming from the UK market and England in particular. Future research should replicate the proposed model with samples from various tourist markets and, further, perform useful comparisons. Third, though intention to recommend the destination has been incorporated as constituent part of destination loyalty alongside commitment, it would be useful to examine its influence within tourists' decision-making process as an independent latent construct. Fourth, this study included past visitation, destination loyalty and intention to revisit as distinct variables in the conceptual model, as per previous research call (Stylos et al. 2017). Notwithstanding, there are still some interesting constructs, e.g. need for variety and alternatives, constraints and facilitating conditions, which could be utilized as alternative moderating variables to enhance model's predictive power. Fifth, it would be interesting to examine the applicability of the proposed model by carrying out a comparative analysis between culturally different populations as per Hofstede's (2011) proposed framework. Finally, while past visitation, destination loyalty and revisit intention are good approximations of actual revisits, a longitudinal study would be an alternative and probably more accurate approach, helping to establish causal relationships among variables under investigation.

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Table 1: Final scales, means, standard deviations, standardized factor loadings, errors and critical ratios of the constructs used in the measurement model.

Construct	Item	Code	Mean (SD)	St. Loading	Std. error	t- statistic
1. Holistic image						
	Rate the overall image of Crete as a tourism destination	HI	6.26 (0.64)	1.000		
2. Subjective norms						
	Most people I know would choose Crete for vacations	SN1	5.44 (1.18)	.774	.024	35.357
	Most people, whose opinion I value, would approve of my decision to travel to Crete for vacations	SN2	5.91 (1.03)	.906		
	Those individuals, who are important to me, would think that I should visit Crete for vacations	SN3	5.85 (1.11)	.881	.023	42.814

3. PA						
Crete is a very special destination to me	PA1	5.28 (1.32)	.765	.025	34.154	
I identify strongly with Crete	PA2	4.92 (1.41)	.788	.024	36.850	
No other place can provide the same holiday experience as Crete	PA3	4.35 (1.53)	.809	.026	35.436	
Holidaying/Vacations in Crete means a lot to me	PA4	5.01 (1.39)	.876	.019	50.432	
I am very attached to Crete as a tourism destination	PA5	4.86 (1.50)	.896			
Crete is the best place for what I like to do on vacations	PA6	4.53 (1.42)	.829	.023	39.927	
Holidaying in Crete is more important to me than holidaying in other places	PA7	4.19 (1.56)	.823	.023	39.495	
I would not substitute any other destination for the types of things I did during my holidays in Crete	PA8	3.91 (1.55)	.717	.027	29.780	
4. Past visitation						
During the last 5 years, how many times did you travel to Crete for vacations	VF	2.69 (2.15)	1.000			
5. Intention to Recommend tourism destination						
I am likely to say positive things about Crete to other people	IR1	6.19 (0.89)	.835	.017	52.319	
I am likely to recommend Crete as a tourism destination to someone who seeks my advice	IR2	6.17 (0.93)	.929			
I am likely to encourage friends and relatives to visit Crete	IR3	6.06 (1.01)	.898	.020	47.832	
6. Destination Commitment						
I am willing to continue holidaying in Crete even if the prices increase somewhat	DC1	5.25 (1.59)	.611	.028	23.200	
I will not visit other destinations, if a visit to Crete is feasible	DC2	5.76 (1.34)	.641	.025	27.361	
I consider Crete as my first choice to take future vacations	DC3	4.57 (1.65)	.554	.028	21.249	
7. Intention to Revisit Tourism Destination						
I intend to travel again to Crete sometime within the next 2 years	IRD1	5.72 (1.41)	.926			
I want to visit Crete again within the next 2 years	IRD2	5.49 (1.35)	.877	.019	49.980	
The possibility for me to travel to Crete within the next 2 years is...	IRD3	5.62 (1.50)	.894	.018	52.280	
Crete could be again my next vacations place	IRD4	5.16 (1.64)	.726	.023	34.082	

Note: HI: Holistic image, SN: Subjective norms, PA: Place attachment, VF: Visitation frequency, DL: Destination loyalty, IR: Intention to recommend tourism destination, DC: Destination commitment, IRD: Intention to revisit tourism destination, SD: Standard deviation. All t-statistics are significant at $p < 0.001$.

Table 2: Fit Indices, measurement model and corresponding structural model.

Fit Indices	Measurement Model		Structural Model		Criteria
	B	C	B	C	
χ^2/df	4.149 for $p < .001$	3.324 for $p < .001$	3.401 for $p = .009 > .001$	3.401 for $p = .009 > .001$	< 5
CFI	.933	.941	.997	.998	$> .90$
TLI	.914	.922	.980	.981	$> .90$
RMSEA	.056	.051	.042	.042	$< .08$
SRMR	.0649	.0556	.0234	.0222	$< .08$ (CFI $> .92$)

Note: χ^2/df : chi-square normed, CFI: Comparative fit index, TLI: Tucker Lewis index, RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation, SRMR: Standardized root mean residual; B: Baseline model (aggregate destination loyalty); C: Competing model (dimensional destination loyalty), i.e. intention to recommend and destination commitment

Table 3: Construct Reliability and Validity measures of the measurement models for both baseline and competing models.

			CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Revisit Intention	B	.918	.738	.355	.311	.859					
		C	.919	.740	.607	.367	.860					
2	PA	B	.940	.664	.355	.283	.596	.815				
		C	.941	.666	.546	.337	.598	.816				
3	Subjective Norms	B	.891	.732	.398	.263	.475	.405	.856			
		C	.891	.732	.393	.254	.475	.406	.856			
4	Intention to Recommend	B	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
		C	.921	.796	.477	.357	.529	.527	.627	.892		
5	Destination Commitment	B	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
		C	.798	.647	.571	.465	.779	.739	.481	.691	.804	
6	Destination Loyalty	B	.887	.576	.398	.359	.593	.573	.631	-	-	.759
		C	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: CR: Composite reliability, AVE: Average variance extracted, MSV: Maximum Shared Squared Variance, ASV: Average Shared Squared Variance, PA: Place Attachment; B: Baseline model (aggregate destination loyalty); C: Competing model (dimensional destination loyalty), i.e. intention to recommend and destination commitment

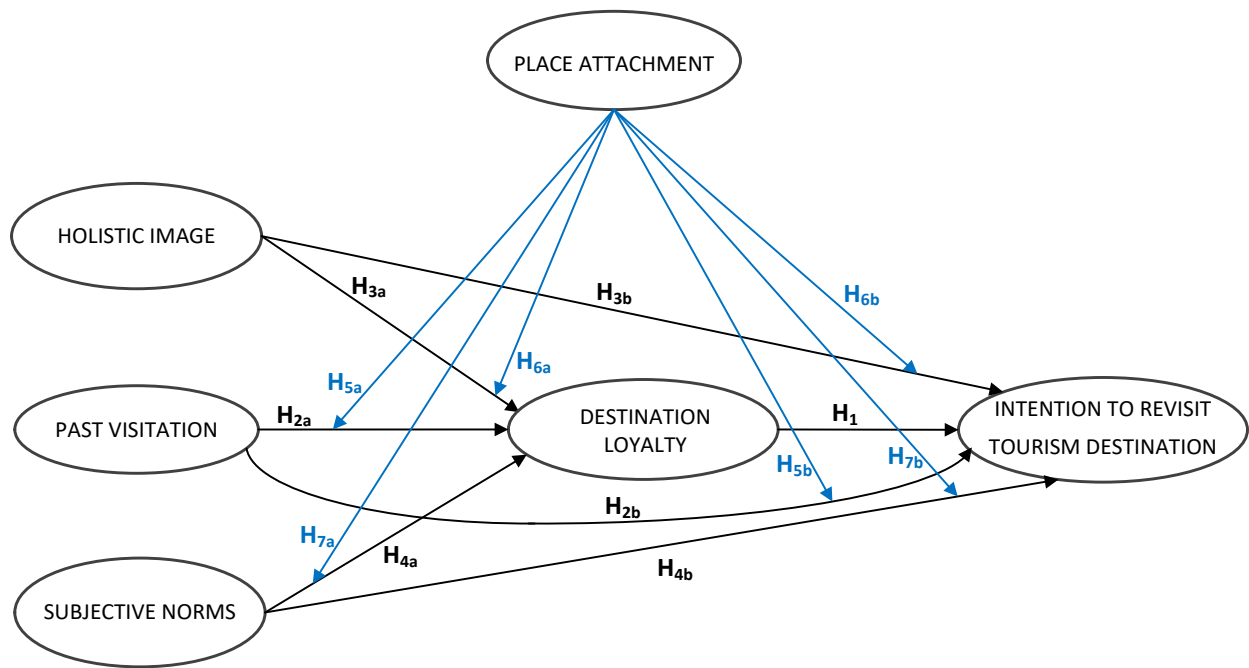
Table 4: Results obtained for the structural model relationships tested.

Regression paths			Model	St.RW	S.E.	C.R.	P
Destination Loyalty	←	HI	B	.244	.020	11.849	<.001
			C	-	-	-	-
Destination Loyalty	←	Subjective norms	B	.295	.020	14.606	<.001
			C	-	-	-	-
Destination Loyalty	←	PA	B	.392	.021	18.674	<.001
			C	-	-	-	-
Destination Loyalty	←	Past visitation	B	.032	.021	1.496	.136
			C	-	-	-	-
Revisit Intention	←	Past visitation	B	.223	.023	9.487	<.001
			C	.198	.022	8.914	<.001
Revisit intention	←	Subjective norms	B	.103	.024	4.316	<.001
			C	.149	.023	6.483	<.001
Revisit intention	←	HI	B	.054	.023	2.257	.024
			C	.080	.022	3.516	<.001

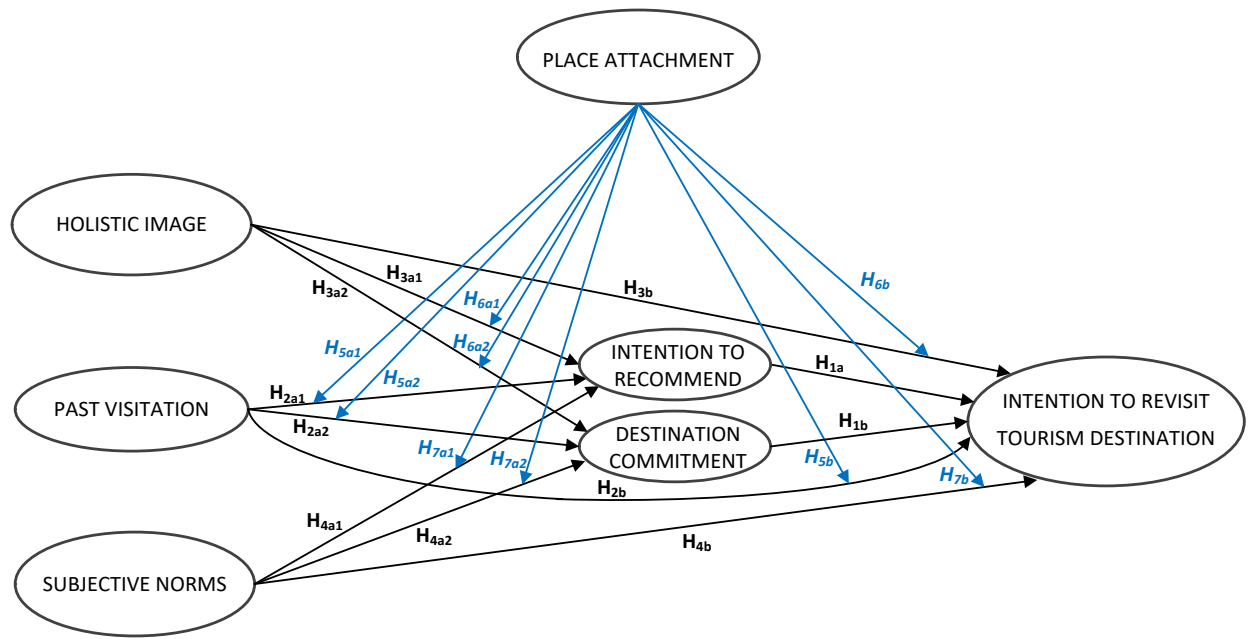
Regression paths			Model	St.RW	S.E.	C.R.	P
Revisit intention	←	PA	B	.237	.026	9.147	<.001
			C	.144	.025	5.635	<.001
Revisit Intention	←	Destination Loyalty	B	.335	.030	11.238	<.001
			C	-	-	-	-
Revisit Intention	←	Intention to Recommend	B	-	-	-	-
			C	-.050	.028	-1.794	.073
Revisit Intention	←	Destination Commitment	B	-	-	-	-
			C	.461	.027	16.898	<.001
Destination Loyalty	←	HI_x_PA	B	-.060	.016	-2.828	.005
			C	-	-	-	-
Destination Loyalty	←	SN_x_PA	B	-.081	.017	-3.944	<.001
			C	-	-	-	-
Destination Loyalty	←	PV_x_PA	B	.008	.018	.398	.691
			C	-	-	-	-
Revisit Intention	←	HI_x_PA	B	-.046	.018	-1.966	.049
			C	-.070	.017	-3.162	.002
Revisit Intention	←	SN_x_PA	B	-.020	.019	-.870	.384
			C	-.020	.018	-.942	.346
Revisit Intention	←	PV_x_PA	B	-.090	.019	-4.150	<.001
			C	-.081	.018	-3.913	<.001
Intention to Recommend	←	PA	B	-	-	-	-
			C	.242	.023	10.667	<.001
Intention to Recommend	←	HI_x_PA	B	-	-	-	-
			C	-.091	.018	-3.982	<.001
Intention to Recommend	←	SN_x_PA	B	-	-	-	-
			C	-.078	.019	-3.514	<.001
Intention to Recommend	←	HI	B	-	-	-	-
			C	.268	.022	12.041	<.001
Intention to Recommend	←	PV_x_PA	B	-	-	-	-
			C	.022	.019	1.010	.312
Intention to Recommend	←	Subjective norms	B	-	-	-	-
			C	.347	.022	15.890	<.001
Intention to Recommend	←	Past visitation	B	-	-	-	-
			C	-.005	.023	-.216	.829
Destination Commitment	←	PA	B	-	-	-	-
			C	.513	.023	22.185	<.001
Destination Commitment	←	HI_x_PA	B	-	-	-	-
			C	-.001	.018	-.045	.964
Destination Commitment	←	SN_x_PA	B	-	-	-	-
			C	-.066	.019	-2.935	.003
Destination Commitment	←	HI	B	-	-	-	-
			C	.151	.022	6.647	<.001

Regression paths			Model	St.RW	S.E.	C.R.	P
Destination Commitment ← PV_x_PA			B	-	-	-	-
			C	-.013	.020	-.604	.546
Destination Commitment ← Subjective norms			B	-	-	-	-
			C	.154	.022	6.923	<.001
Destination Commitment ← Past visitation			B	-	-	-	-
			C	.075	.023	3.199	.001

Note: HI: Holistic image, PV: Past visitation, SN: Subjective norms, PA: Place attachment, St. RW: Standardized regression weight, S.E.: Standard error, C.R.: Critical ratio, p: p-value; B: Baseline model (aggregate destination loyalty); C: Competing model (dimensional destination loyalty), i.e. intention to recommend and destination commitment



(a) Baseline model (aggregate destination loyalty)



(b) Competing model (dimensional destination loyalty)

Figure 1. The proposed baseline and competing models (a, b) with the relevant hypotheses.

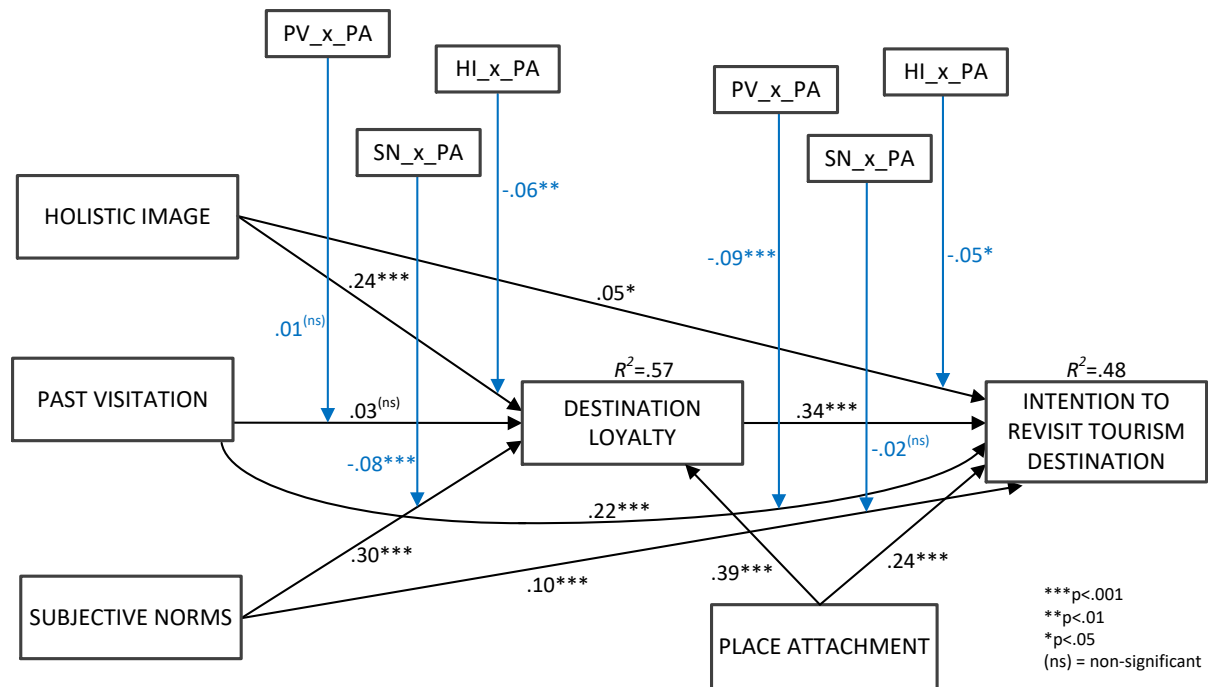


Figure 2. Structural model results for the baseline model.

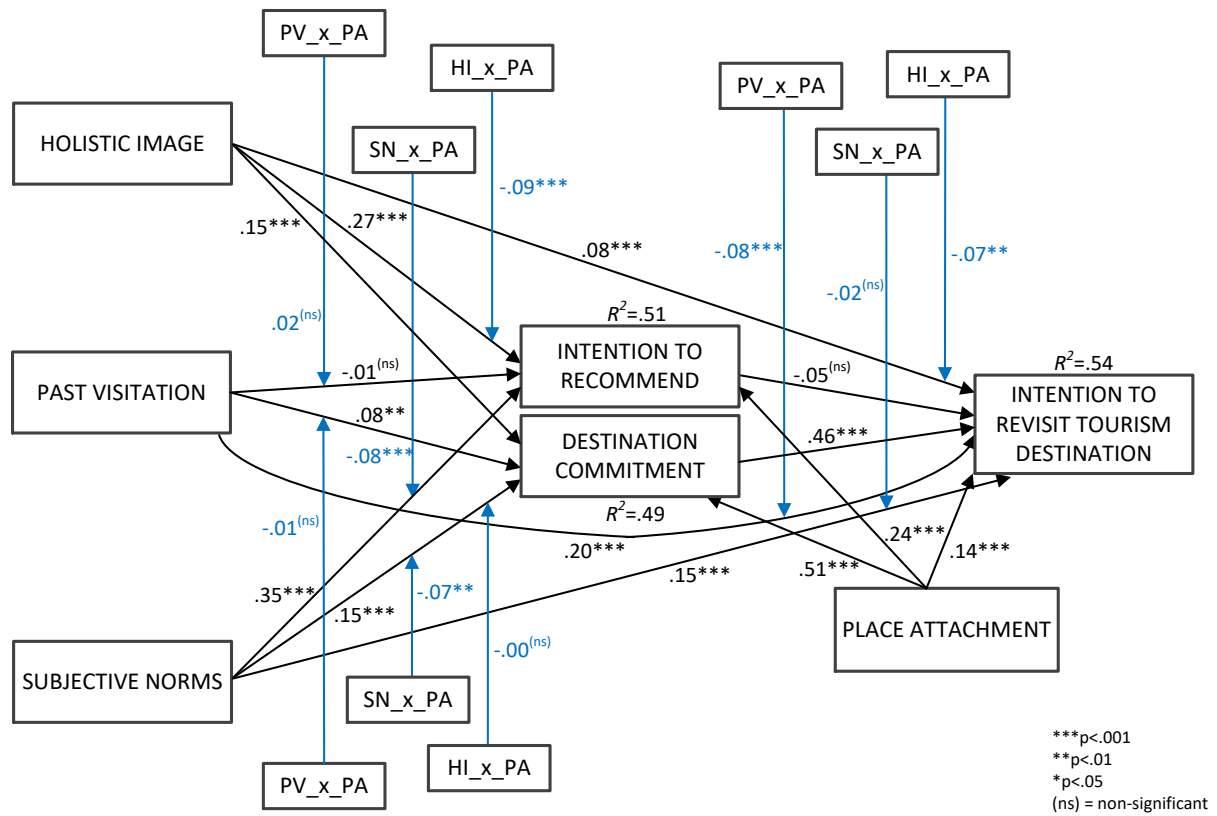


Figure 3. Structural model results for the competing model.

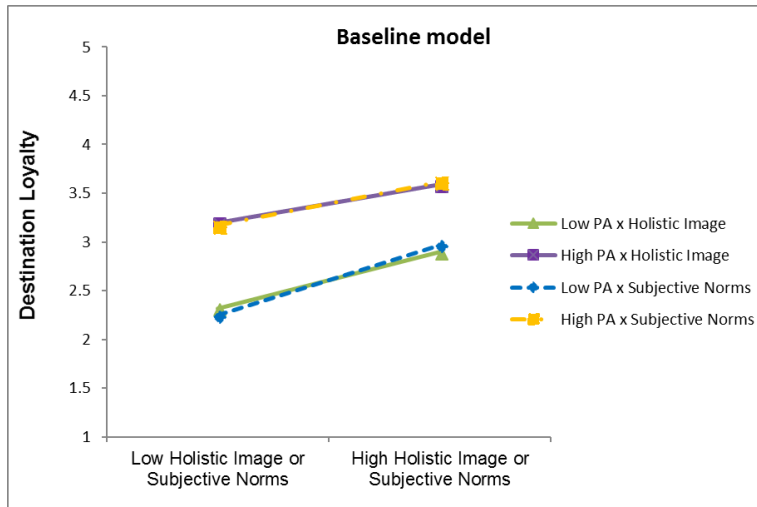


Figure 4. Plots of significant holistic image \times PA, and subjective norms \times PA interactions for predicting destination loyalty to Crete for the UK tourist market (baseline model).

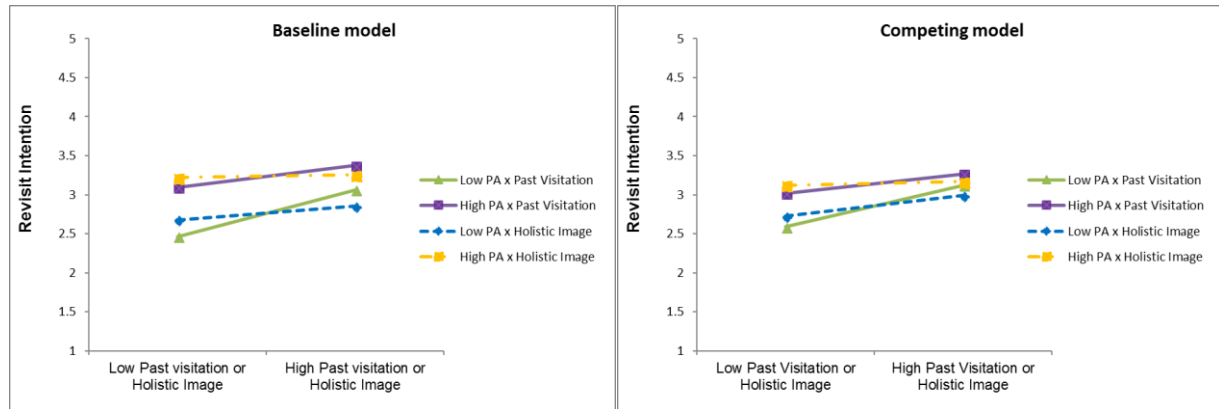


Figure 5. Plots of significant past visitation x PA and holistic image x PA interactions for predicting intention to revisit Crete for the UK tourist market (baseline and competing model).

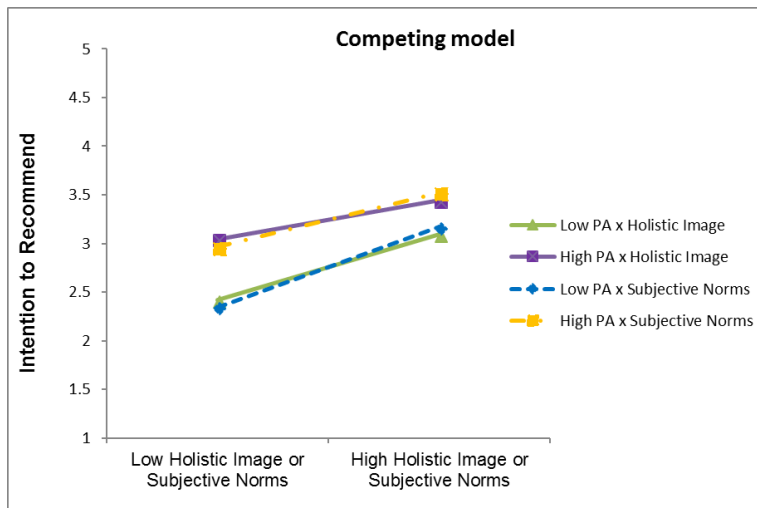


Figure 6. Plots of significant holistic image \times PA and subjective norms \times PA interactions for predicting intention to recommend Crete for the UK tourist market (competing model).

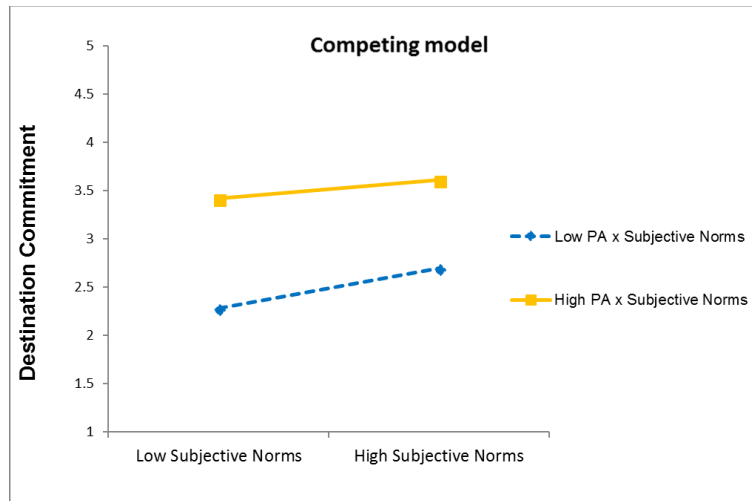


Figure 7. Plot of significant subjective norms \times PA interaction for predicting commitment to Crete for the UK tourist market (competing model).